

# ITCHED HIS RICH WIFE OVER THE CLIFF?

*How the New Scientific Detective Methods  
Are Trying to Decide Whether Mrs.  
Price's Death Was An Extraordinary  
Accident or a Peculiarly Cruel Murder*

THERE is an old adage that murder will out, and another that the seeds of a man's destruction lie always in himself. Both of these expressions of human experience are repeated in another form by the formula of the modern scientific detectives, who claim that no criminal can so imitate natural occurrences as to efface all traces, to a practised eye, of his own handiwork.

In other words, no man bent upon the commission of a crime can so arrange the circumstances of that crime that it will afterwards appear, point by point, as an accident.

Particularly is this so of murder. It is upon the lines of this theory that the famous French and German scientific detectives have achieved such startling successes. The same methods are responsible for the recent arrest of Frederick T. Price, of Minneapolis, on the charge of murdering his rich, young wife a little more than a year ago, and when he is tried these methods will be equally on trial.

On the evening of November 28, 1914, Price took Mrs. Price riding in his automobile along the Mississippi road, the principal pleasure-drive of that city. With them was Charles T. Etchison, a friend of the pair. Mrs. Price took with her a little pet dog.

At one point the road runs along the edge of a cliff about one hundred feet high, looking down into the valley of the river.

Here the auto stopped. A few minutes later men, attracted by the shouts of Etchison, came running to the spot. Descending the cliff with him they found Price bending over his wife. She died without gaining consciousness.

Price told the police that a defective spark plug had caused him to stop at the place he did. Mrs. Price had gotten out with her dog. The dog had fallen over the cliff and, in an effort to save it, Mrs. Price had herself fallen. Price's story was accepted at the time, but the scientific analysis of it was begun.

## How the Police Reconstructed the Case.

It was discovered, first, that the dog when found was still alive. It was battered—instead of being scratched and torn as it would have been from a fall; battered as though it had been hurled out into the air for the more than one hundred foot descent from the boulevard. Furthermore its weight was not more than fifteen pounds, and so light a body would inevitably have been caught by projections and brush on the cliff's face. The police concluded, therefore, that it must have been thrown.

Examination of Mrs. Price's body showed no bruises such as would have been caused by rolling down the cliff face. Neither was her clothing torn as it would have been if she had simply tumbled over the edge and had crashed down through the brush and over the rocks. Minute examination of the face of the cliff revealed no trace of the passage of any heavy object such as her body.

The wound that had caused her death was a jagged, crushing cut on the head. There were no stones nearby which could have produced this particular cut. There was no mark of blood or hair on the cliff face. The wound appeared as though it had been made by the bringing down of a heavy three-cornered rock upon her head while she lay where she was found.

Mrs. Price's body was fifteen feet from the base of the cliff. Experiments with dummies of her weight and size showed it was practically impossible for her to have fallen off the cliff and to have landed on that exact spot, but a dummy of her weight and size hurled from the cliff did strike on the exact spot where she was found.

Close examination of the defective spark plug led the police to believe that it had been only recently installed and that it had been defective when installed.

The police, reconstructing the tragedy along scientific lines, drew a picture entirely at variance with that of Price's. It had been planned, they argued, to stop at this, the dangerous, point on the boulevard. The defective spark plug had been substituted to give an excuse for stopping. Mrs. Price had been persuaded to leave the car. She had then been hurled over the cliff. The dog had been thrown after her. Mrs. Price had not been fatally hurt and she had been killed after her fall by someone battering in her head with a rock.

Mrs. Price, whose family is very rich, had just received, it was also discovered, \$12,000 from one of her sources of income. Price, immediately after her death, had himself declared her heir and executor.

The police wished, however, to make absolutely sure and, keeping Price continually under surveillance, they sought corroboration of their theory.

On last December, one year after Mrs. Price's death, they received information concerning Etchison that made them act. They arrested Price on a charge of homicide and a few days

later he and Etchison were jointly indicted by the Minneapolis Grand Jury for murder in the first degree.

Persuaded by his wife in a dramatic scene Etchison made a confession. The confession, printed below, is, if true, a brief for the methods of the modern scientific detectives.

In his first statement Etchison said that Price had deliberately removed a good spark plug and had substituted a defective one to provide him with an excuse for stopping at the place where he had planned to throw his wife over the cliff. His second statement in full was as follows:

"It was about five years ago that I first met Price. I answered an advertisement for salesmen. He was manager for a concern selling scales. I was employed by him, and for about three years we were much together. Then we drifted apart, but kept in touch with each other. Later I came back to Minneapolis and started to work selling stock for a local concern. In the meantime I was unfortunate in business ventures and borrowed \$1,050 from Price. For this loan he held my notes.

"Frequently he pressed me for payment and threatened to commence an action in the courts and take my furniture and other belongings.

## "Help Me Do Away With My Wife."

"One day he came to my room in the Vendome Hotel, and after a few generalities, startled me by saying that he should have money—no matter how he got it. I suggested he borrow from his wife, for he had always told me her family had money. He replied that was impossible. This conversation was in October, 1914. At the conclusion of his talk Price turned to me and said suddenly:

"Fred, listen. I've got to have money, even if I have to do away with my wife."

"I thought him joking at first, and paid no attention to what he said. Swiftly Price turned to me, repeated the sentence and added, 'and you have got to help me.'

"'Help you do what?' I queried. "Do away with my wife," came the answer, and he continued: "I will pay you well. Not only will I give back the notes for the money you owe, but I will give you some more, once she is out of the way."

"I did not know that Price was serious. I tried to laugh it off. I knew he had been drinking a little and thought his talk wild, but he came again with the same proposition. I thought seriously of going to the authorities and telling them what he was proposing, but I knew he had influential friends and would probably prove to them I had lied. Being in his debt, I fenced for a time, and apparently acquiesced to his plan.

"If you don't help me," Price, frequently told me, 'I will kill my wife in your presence and do it in a way that the blame will fall upon you. You have got to help me, and I have the plans all made.'

"On the day before November 28—the day Mrs. Price was killed—Price came and asked me to get tickets for the play and theatre, 'after that we will take an automobile,' he said, with a look I did not like. I again thought of going to the authorities, but I doubted if they, or even the little wife, would believe what I had to say.

"I bought the tickets. The play was the 'Price of Pilsen' at the Metropolitan. Mrs. Price enjoyed the play and laughed. Price watched it moodily. I was nervous. I tried to catch Price's eye, but he avoided me.

"I watched Mrs. Price—she was a dear, sweet little woman, and a warm friend of mine. Not for the world would I have harmed a hair of her head. Even as a boy I hated death and pain. I never shot a rabbit back in the days when I lived with my father and mother on a farm near Decatur, Ill., but I was sorry.

"I watched the little wife as she laughed at the play, and wondered. I was afraid of Price, and fearful of his power to take away my belongings. But through it all came the thought that Price would really do it.

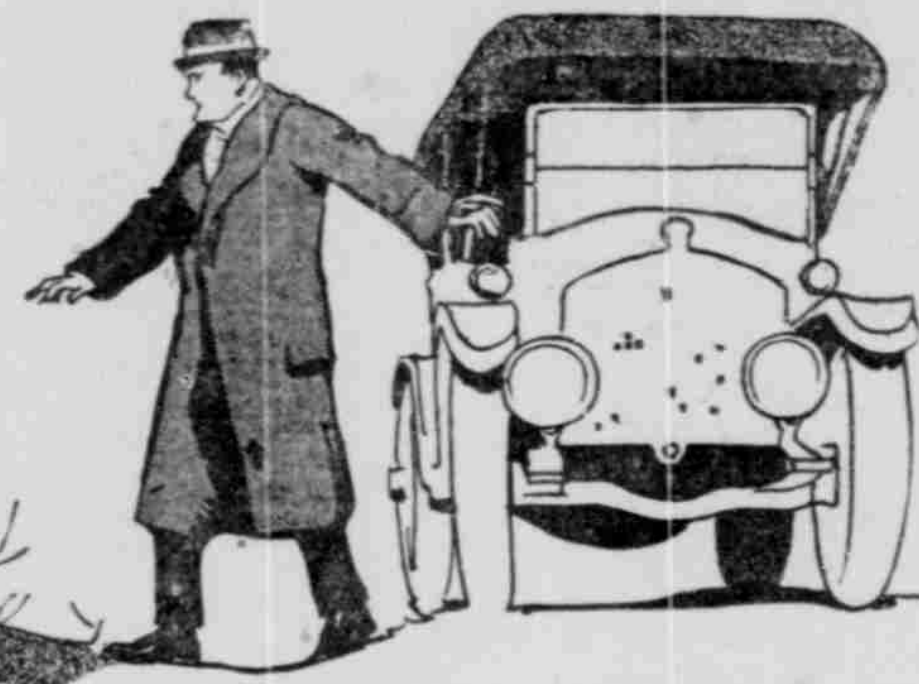
## "The Dark Ride to Death."

"Toward the Price home at Spruce Place he drove, and I hoped the ride would end there, but once the house was reached, he asked his wife to go in and get the dog and we would get a little air.

"No one will ever know how I felt when I saw Price piloting the machine in the direction of the dark river road. Mile after mile we travelled without a word. Mrs. Price and the dog were on the back seat. Several times I tried to talk but Mrs. Price would not listen.

"In a ride of what seemed hours we finally reached the road that skirts the river. The machine stopped. Price said he had to fix the engine. A light from a nearby house shone across the path he had shown me.

"Price jumped from the automobile, and I recall his asking his wife to give the dog a little exercise. What happened after that I



The Cliff Face Over Which Mrs. Price Either Fell or Was Hurled by Her Husband.



Charles D. Etchison, Who Confesses to Having Been a Witness of What He Charges Is Murder, and Mrs. Etchison, Whose Prayers Persuaded Her Husband to Make His Confession.



Frederick T. Price, Whose Arrest on the Charge of Wife Murder Is the Result of Police Investigation on the Lines of the Modern Scientific Criminology.

"I had a puncture and drove from the hospital to a garage to fix the machine. Later Price came out. 'She is dead,' he said slyly. 'Did the fall kill her?' I asked.

"'No,' Price replied, 'it didn't.' 'He asked me if I had seen the dog.'

"I said I had not. Later a policeman brought the dog to the hospital. It was the night Price went with me to my room at the Vendome Hotel and there we slept. He had a bottle of whiskey with him and took several drinks. Once I said, 'Price, that was an awful thing to do.'

"'I know it,' he said, 'but it had to be done, and now it is all over. Don't worry. You will get your money, and that's all you have to worry about.'

"The next day we had breakfast and separated. We avoided each other until the day of the funeral. I attended, because I could not stay away. I saw Price there and he nodded. 'All you have to do,' he told me, 'is to keep your mouth shut.'

"Morning and night I could hear the moans of the woman as we found her lying at the bottom of the cliff. Later Price came to me with my notes for \$1,050 and paid me \$1,500 in bills, promising there was more to come as soon as he had sold the bonds his wife had received from her father. I took my wife and went to my home in Illinois and spent Christmas. My wife asked what was worrying me. I again thought of going to the officers and telling them what I knew. Then I went to Washington. There Price sent me his personal check for \$100 and a bank draft of \$1,050. That was all he ever gave me.

"Then came the arrest in Washington. I told my story to Mr. Armstrong, Assistant County Attorney in Chicago, and it brought relief. I will repeat it again on the witness stand. It is the truth and the whole truth.

"Never before have I been in trouble. All the trouble I have ever known in this world has come to me through Price. I have no attorney. I need none. I will tell the Court and the jury my story. If I have done wrong they will punish me. But it is the truth that I did not believe Price would really carry out his threats. Of murder I am innocent. I was an unwilling witness to the killing of a woman who had always been sweet and kind to me."

Price, himself, declares he is innocent, that Etchison is a drug user and his story a complete fabrication.

The Minneapolis police have found that Price was named twice before he became the husband of the woman who died so tragically and, shortly after her death married again.

"The Body of Mrs. Price, with That of Her Dog, Was Found at the Bottom of the Cliff. Did She Stumble and Fall Off—or Was She Hurled to Death by Her Husband?"